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SUBJECT: NEW WAZIRISTAN TERRORIST ALLIANCE

Classified By: Anne W. Patterson, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (S/NF) Summary: Rival Pakistani Taliban leaders Baitullah Mehsud, Maulvi Nazir, and Hafiz Gul Bahadur formed a new militant alliance on February 23. The new alliance recognizes Taliban leader Mullah Omar as its leader, and its goal is to fight the planned U.S. troop surge in Afghanistan. The Pakistani militant leaders will maintain their independent militants groups but will now facilitate cooperation in cross-border attacks in Afghanistan. It is too early to say how effective this new alliance will be in launching cross-border attacks against U.S./NATO forces in Afghanistan, but it does give the largest and most powerful Pakistani Taliban leaders unfettered access across North and South Waziristan. Formation of the alliance demonstrates that the GOP's tribal "divide and conquer" strategy is not working, at least not to our advantage. Civilian leaders are concerned about the continuing loss of government writ in the Waziristans after this agreement, but Pakistan's security forces may see few downsides to an alliance that focuses its attacks outside of Pakistan. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) On February 23, Tehreek-e-Taliban (TTP) leader Baitullah Mehsud signed a deal with two powerful rival Taliban commanders Maulvi Nazir of South Waziristan and Hafiz Gul Bahadur of North Waziristan. The three, according to press reports, have formed a new group called Shura Ittihad-ul-Mujahideen (Mujahideen Unity Council), that they claim will unite them against external forces trying to divide the multiple Taliban groups based in Pakistan. They have formed a 13-member shura to run the affairs of the new alliance. The militants named Mullah Omar as their supreme leader, but the group did not choose a leader of its operational shura. According to a joint public statement, the militant leaders praised Osama Bin Laden and Mullah Omar as defenders of Islam and Muslims. The spokesman for Baitullah Mehsud, Mufti Waliullah, said that the three Taliban commanders would now operate from a single platform under the new alliance. Currently Baitullah Mehsud controls the eastern portion of South Waziristan, which is populated largely by Mehsud tribesmen. Maulvi Nazir is based out of the Ahmedzai Wazir area of South Waziristan on the agency's western border with Afghanistan. Hafiz Gul Bahadur leads his Utmanzai Wazir militants from Miram Shah, North Waziristan.

¶3. (C) The formation of the new alliance follows Baitullah Mehsud's December 2007 formation of TTP as an umbrella group to better coordinate pro-Taliban activities. The creation of the TTP was the merger of various Pakistani militant groups operating under disparate commands in different tribal agencies. The TTP alliance runs as a loose federation rather than a strictly controlled organization. Each of the militant leaders maintains a degree of autonomy and Baitullah Mehsud, as the strongest leader of Pakistani Taliban, lends his support and coordination to the various TTP subcommanders

in places such as Bajaur and Swat. Nazir, who broke openly with Mehsud in the spring of 2007 (see para 6), was not a part of TTP. Bahadur, who had jockeyed with Mehsud for the title of pre-eminent local militant leader in the Waziristans, had maintained some distance from the TTP label before now.

¶4. (C) The new Mujahideen Unity Council will likely be another loose federation with each Taliban commander maintaining his own authority. Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) Secretariat Additional Chief Secretary Habibullah Khan expressed concern to Peshawar Principal Officer in a February 24 meeting that this new body provides all three militant leaders with unfettered access to all of South and North Waziristan. Baitullah Mehsud will be a main beneficiary of this new access, giving his fighters easier entry to the Afghanistan border through Maulvi Nazir's Wazir-held territory. Before the deal, Mehsud had limited access to the border from his portion of South Waziristan because he was blocked either by Maulvi Nazir or Gul Bahadur. While the alliance will not work as a tight top-down militant organization, it will facilitate access and coordination of various Pakistani Taliban as they cross into Afghanistan.

¶5. (C) While Khan had no hard facts, he detected the hand of the Haqqani network in bringing these rival commanders together. The new coordination, he feared, will allow the Taliban to focus on sending militants across the border into Afghanistan. Sirajuddin Haqqani also claimed in the press that he had convinced the three rival Taliban leaders to meet. Sirajuddin and his father Jalaluddin Haqqani lead much of the Taliban militancy in eastern Afghanistan. Sirajuddin often travels to the tribal areas of Pakistan, North Waziristan in particular, and has served as a mediator between these rival Taliban leaders.

¶6. (S/NF) In the past, the Pakistani government has supported Maulvi Nazir in an attempt to counter Baitullah Mehsud in South Waziristan. In the spring of 2007, an open break between Nazir and Mehsud took place over the presence of "Uzbek" fighters in South Waziristan. The disagreement culminated in an operation in which Pakistani security forces fought alongside Nazir's followers to oust Uzbeks from the area. While Nazir appeared to draw on genuine local anger and desire to remove "Uzbeks," his activities as an al-Qaida facilitator and promoter of cross-border attacks have always complicated Pakistani efforts to sell this episode as a "success" story. A South Waziristan-based contact told Principal Officer Peshawar on February 24 that Mehsud and Nazir are showing signs of getting past old disagreements and that "Uzbeks" are re-appearing in growing numbers in the area.

¶7. (SBU) According to Pakistani newspapers, Ahmedzai Wazir elders of South Waziristan, who are concerned about the new alliance and the possibility of "Uzbeks" coming back into their territory, questioned Maulvi Nazir about the deal with rival Mehsud. At a meeting in Wana, South Waziristan Maulvi Nazir assured the elders that each militant group will continue to have its own independent status and remain sovereign in their own territory. Nazir explained that the alliance was formed "only to act together against the United States" because the Taliban was concerned about the troop surge in Afghanistan, according to Pakistan press reports. The elders publicly cautioned Nazir that they would turn against him if this new deal brought any harm to their areas.

¶8. (C) While he did not touch on a possible ISI role in brokering this new alliance, Habibullah Khan noted that pressure has been building on the Pakistani military in the Waziristans. The Pakistani military and then Northwest Frontier Province Governor Orakzai quietly entered peace deals with North Waziristan commanders in December 2007 and with Baitullah Mehsud in February 2008 in order to achieve relative peace. Those agreements came after a series of high profile attacks on the military in the Waziristans, including the kidnapping of over 250 security forces by Baitullah

Mehsud and Jan 2008 fighting at Ladha Fort in South Waziristan. While violence directed at the military in the Waziristans has been minor in the last few months, Peshawar observers regularly note that the military remains concerned with its ability to keep a lid on trouble in these two agencies. Chief of Army Staff General Kayani believes the respite offered by this latest agreement is necessary for his stretched forces to continue fighting in Bajaur and Mohmand agencies. However, the relative quiet in South and North Waziristan has allowed Baitullah Mehsud to increasingly send his fighters in other parts of the FATA and Northwest Frontier Province, including Swat.

¶9. (C) Khan also noted with deep dismay that this announcement demonstrates that these militant commanders see themselves in a strong enough position to form an alliance that takes them one step closer to a formal territorial takeover of the Waziristan as an "Islamic Emirate." South Waziristan contacts also commented that there is an increasing presence of Punjabi militants from Jaish-e Muhammad in the Mehsud areas of South Waziristan. (Comment: A development if accurate that is almost certainly of concern to the Pakistani military. It is significant that Baitullah Mehsud's strength and open militancy are drawing fighters from places such as southern Punjab.)

¶10. (C) As this new alliance formed, Mullah Omar ordered militants in North and South Waziristan to immediately stop their attacks on Pakistani security forces, according to press reports. Omar said in a letter to the militants, "If anybody really wants to wage jihad, they must fight the U.S. and NATO troops inside Afghanistan." The letter also stated that Omar was responsible for the agreement between Mehsud, Nazir, and Bahadur, and that after this agreement "the attacks on Pakistani security forces by the local Taliban will decrease if not end completely." Mullah Omar continues to exert considerable influence on the militants in South and North Waziristan. Halting attacks against Pakistani forces may increase the militants' safe haven space in Pakistan, allowing the militants to cross the border to attack NATO forces in Afghanistan.

¶11. (C) Comment: It is too early to predict how effective this new alliance will be in launching cross-border attacks on U.S./NATO forces, but its formation will provide the group with unfettered access to Afghanistan across North and South Waziristan. It is another indication that the GOP's tribal divide and conquer strategy against militants is not working, at least not to our advantage. Pakistan's security forces, however, may see limited downsides to an arrangement that focuses militant attacks outside of Pakistan.